



## Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration  
P.O. Box 3621  
Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

November 16, 2001

In reply refer to: KEC-4

**To: People Who May Be Interested in the Proposed Mountain Lakes Trout Restoration Project in Montana**

**Proposal:** The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to fund a project to remove exotic trout species from selected lakes in the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead drainages, some of which occur in the Bob Marshall and Great Bear Wildernesses, and to replace those lakes with genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The purposes of this project would be to (1) preserve the genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout populations in the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead drainage; (2) eliminate, to the extent possible and in a timely manner, from headwater lakes the exotic trout that threaten genetically pure stocks of westslope cutthroat (see enclosed maps); (3) establish genetically pure cutthroat populations in sufficient quantities to dominate any remaining hybrid fish; (4) reduce the potential for illegal introduction of exotics by anglers; and (5) maintain angling opportunities.

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) jointly leads this project with BPA and would conduct the activities associated with this project. The Flathead National Forest is a cooperating agency for preparation of this Environmental Assessment (EA). This project was recommended for funding under the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, as partial mitigation for Hungry Horse Dam hydroelectric operations.

**Background:** The South Fork Flathead River, above Hungry Horse Dam, geographically offers one of the largest intact populations of native westslope cutthroat trout in the nation. However, numerous lakes in the South and Middle Forks, that harbor non-native (exotic) fish populations, have provided a source of exotic fish to genetically contaminate downstream populations of pure westslope cutthroat trout. Contamination occurred in the past when people planted the lakes with non-native species in order to increase or enhance angling opportunities.

Since then, most of the lakes have been stocked with pure westslope cutthroat from the state's captive westslope cutthroat broodstock in an attempt to shift the populations toward a genetically pure state. Although this "swamping" technique has had favorable results in some locations, genetic surveys have shown that non-native populations in headwater lakes have continued to escape downstream, threatening the genetic integrity of pure stocks in tributary streams downstream in the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead drainage.

The underlying need for this project is to protect the genetically pure populations of native westslope cutthroat currently existing in the Flathead River Watershed from hybridization with

rainbow trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout. This is a proactive project to maintain and improve the population status of westslope cutthroat trout and to prevent them from being considered for endangered listing in the future.

**Environmental analysis:** The type of action proposed requires preparation of an EA, as listed in the Department of Energy Regulations on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We will prepare an EA, following established NEPA regulations and procedures. On the basis of the analysis in the EA, BPA will either prepare a Finding of No Significant Impact and MFWP may then proceed with the action, or BPA will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement if the EA reveals the potential for significant environmental impacts.

**How to be involved:** You will be invited to comment on the Preliminary EA when it is published in the spring of 2002. If you would like to receive either a hard copy or an electronic copy of the EA, please check the designated box on the enclosed card and return the card by January 15, 2002. If you would like your name taken off the project mail list, please check that box. If the card is not returned, you will be notified when the Preliminary EA is available for review.

**For more information:** If you need more information about the project, please call me at 503-230-5756, or toll free at 1-800 282-3713, or contact me at my e-mail address: [caspierring@bpa.gov](mailto:caspierring@bpa.gov).

Sincerely,

*/s/ Colleen Spiering*

Colleen Spiering  
Environmental Project Manager

Enclosures:  
Reply Card  
Maps





